

Netflix drama 'glamorises teenage suicide'

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A television drama that has captured the imagination of British teenagers has been accused of glamorising suicide.

The producers of *13 Reasons Why* have been criticised for overturning a convention not to focus on suicide methods in order to avoid copycat attempts. The series poses a particular risk to younger viewers as it is being offered on the streaming service Netflix, meaning that teenagers can watch episodes alone at any time, critics have said.

Ged Flynn, chief executive of Papyrus, a suicide prevention charity, said that its Facebook page and Twitter feed had picked up "considerable traffic" from teenagers and parents concerned

about the drama's portrayal of suicide. The American series, based on a 2007 novel of the same name by Jay Asher, is set in a school and tells the story of a teenage girl, Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves a series of cassette tapes that relate events involving classmates leading up to her suicide. A story from the tapes is featured in each of the 13 episodes.

The drama, released last month and one of the most promoted programmes available to British viewers on Netflix, earned positive reviews for its cast and production.

Mr Flynn, who watched several episodes after it was drawn to his attention, said that it was beautifully presented but criticised it for suggesting that suicide was a viable or inevitable option

and, in particular, for depicting the method of suicide.

"Any depiction of suicidal methods or romanticising it or showing it as a viable option leads to potential suicide contagion," he said. "I spend my life saying to young people, 'Talk about suicide: don't hide it, talk openly and honestly if you are worried.' But there is always an asterisk at the end of that line: don't talk about method."

The series does direct viewers to mental health support and the Samaritans but Mr Flynn said that this was not enough. "When we talk about suicide to young people, whether it is in the classroom, a helpline, one-to-one meeting or small group setting, we provide safety and we provide a context in which people explore those realities.

This drama goes out on Netflix. It is elective viewing: people can choose when to watch it, usually on their own, usually out of sight in their room or on their handheld appliances.

"There is no way in which they know that this is going to trigger them. They won't be supervised."

The Samaritans also raised concerns, saying that streaming such an American drama to British audiences undermined broadcasting

Catherine Langford as Hannah, who kills herself in the show



regulations. It said: "It is extremely concerning that a drama series aimed at a young audience can be produced outside of the UK and made available to UK audiences and yet not subject to UK media regulation. This is simply not acceptable and creates a barrier to protecting our young audiences in the UK."

Netflix did not respond to a request to comment, but Nic Sheff, one of the show's writers who had attempted suicide, wrote in a blog post published by *Vanity Fair*: "Facing these issues head-on — talking about them, being open about them — will always be our best defence against losing another life."